

Women's Action Forum

Statement 12 February 2014

On February 12, Pakistan Women's Day, Women's Action Forum salutes the heroism of all people, especially women, who have and continue to struggle for an egalitarian, democratic and progressive society and world order.

February 12 marks a milestone in the history of the women's movement in Pakistan. On this day in 1983, women defied the military dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq by taking out a public demonstration in Lahore despite martial law regulations that banned all political activities, processions and public protests. The immediate catalyst for the demonstration was the proposed law of evidence which would effectively have reduced the testimony of women to half that of men; the accumulative trigger was the dictatorship's unrelenting push to rescind women's rights and reduce their status to half a human. This demonstration became the symbol of women's resistance to all forms of oppression and of their unshakeable belief in an equal, equitable and just democratic order guaranteeing the full compendium of human rights for all, in particular those who have been historically marginalized.

Since 1981, Women's Action Forum has consistently fought to protect and promote women's rights and human rights for all. Events since then confirm that WAF's concerns articulated over the last three decades have had precisely those consequences that WAF feared. The militarization and Islamisation have brought the country to a point where its very existence is at stake. Is this the country that was envisaged? Do we want a Country:

- Where the State deliberately created and fostered religious terrorists as a part of its security doctrine,
- Where the Taliban, who are rampantly killing and maiming civilians, destroying State institutions and tearing the country apart, are given validity as stakeholders in determining the future of our country
- Where women have no security, are killed raped, bartered and deprived of their human dignity, with impunity,
- Where even after 66 years, the majority of the people, peasants, workers and minorities suffer discrimination and violence
- Where the accumulative result is the destruction of peace and massive erosion of spaces for dissent, democratic discourses, and promotion of human rights
- Where the State compels Muslim citizens to validate their credentials by declaring others to be 'kaffirs'
- Where religious minorities find it increasingly difficult to survive- where rampant sectarianism has led to the vulnerability of every Shia and where Ahmedis even fear to follow the dictates of their faith.

On this day,

WAF reiterates that unless Pakistan becomes a secular State with a single uniform legal system, these negative trends cannot be arrested and will destroy the very polity of the country.

WAF resolves to continue its struggle in conjunction with others to reclaim the country from all social, political and anti-democratic forces that stand in the way of a progressive, humane and just Pakistan.

WAF calls upon everyone to join it in reaffirming the aspirations of the majority of our people for a just democratic and tolerant Pakistan in which each citizen enjoys equality and dignity of person.